

Treat Her Better by EvieSmallwood

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Summary:

Mike Wheeler, president of Hawkins High A/V Club, best dungeon master in town, and...

the biggest douche on the planet?

(a.k.a. A mileven fight and make-up fic!)

Treat Her Better

Author's Note:

Cheesiness and angst ahoy!

(rating is high T btw)

“Mike.”

Her lips press against him, right in the crest between his jaw and ear, and though it feels like the best thing in the world, with his skin tingling and heart racing, it just *isn't* what he wants right now.

“I have to do this,” he tells her, even though he’s pretty much forgotten what he’s been doing, too. She’s kissing his adam’s apple; gently, slowly. She does it again in another place, so light it almost tickles.

“El,” he breathes, closed eyes shooting open. “El, stop.”

She sighs against him and pulls back. “You’re no fun.”

“Yeah, well,” he doesn’t even bother with a solid retort, just leans further over the paper he’s been writing. It’s an essay for Stanford University, and though the prompt had seemed easy at first, he’s barely halfway through it.

She sighs again. And again. And then she slams the palms of her hands against the back of his chair and starts walking away.

“What?”

“Nothing,” she snaps. Her eyes meet his, and he sees they’re full of a kindling rage. *Oh, great.* “Doesn’t matter.”

“Clearly, it does,” he drops his pencil, “since you’re so eager to interrupt.”

“Oh, yeah, because god forbid anything comes between you and your... whatever you’re doing.” She folds her arms over her chest.

“What *are* you doing?”

“It’s an essay,” he says. “For Stanford University, so if you’ll excuse me—“

“Stanford?!”

He feels his stomach drop at her tone. “Yeah, El. Stanford.”

“That’s in California. That’s *two-thousand* miles away.”

It seems so far when she puts it like that, but Mike can’t help the bristling of defence that grows. “Nancy goes there,” he reminds her, even though she knows that. “It’s not like we wouldn’t know anyone.”

“‘We’?!”

That catches his attention. He can’t help it when his heart starts to race. *Um...what?*

“Yeah,” he stares right into her eyes, which bore into his own with equal the intensity. “*We*. Right?”

Hasn’t it always been? Hasn’t the plan always just been ‘be together, no matter what’? Mike swallows, hard, because he doesn’t understand why her cheeks are flushed with rage and he doesn’t *get* why the prospect of them being together is making her so angry.

“Mike,” she snaps. “You can’t just—”

“Just what?!”

“Decide things like this!” Her voice is rising. “It’s not your place—“

“To apply for colleges?! Excuse me for thinking *my* future was in *my* hands.”

El rolls her eyes. “You know that’s not what I mean—”

“Isn’t it?”

“*No!*” She stomps her foot, and the lights flicker so much one bursts.

Shards of glass explode into tiny specs of dust and rain down on the basement floor.

Mike winces. "What the *hell*, El?"

"You can't decide for me!" She doesn't even care about the lights, apparently. "This is my future too, Mike! Don't you *get* that?!"

"You don't even want to go to college!"

She sucks in a sharp breath. "So?"

"So what does it matter?"

At that, the lines leave her face. She steps back, and then shakes her head. "God," she mutters. "I can't believe you, Mike."

"You can't even think of a reason," he's rolling, now, like an idiot (*stop, stop, stop*). "You just wanted to pick a fight, for attention, because you're so needy and you can't stand it when everything isn't about *you*."

She looks a little like he's slapped her, and he sort of feels like he has. That was way too far, and not even true, but just as he's getting up to apologise (*you stupid idiotic moron*), she grabs her backpack.

"El, wait," he reaches for her hand, but she jerks away.

She's crying.

Oh *shit*.

"I'm sorry—"

"*Fuck you*," she snaps. He flinches back, because she's never said that to him before, and even if he feels like the biggest douche on the planet, it still *stings*.

"El," he tries again, even though she's already walking away. *Please don't go, don't leave, I promise I didn't mean it I didn't mean it I swear.*

"El, come on—"

"I said *fuck. you.*" She swirls around, halfway up the stairs, and gives him a mental push. It's the first one in over five years, but it's also the breaking of a promise.

She'd sworn, when they were fifteen and she'd used her powers on him in a way he didn't particularly care for, that she'd never do it again.

He feels something crack.

El gasps, as if realising what she's done, but she doesn't apologise. Her chin wavers and a tear spills over onto her cheek but then she's running up the basement steps and out of sight.

He doesn't go after her. He stares at the place where she was, completely stunned.

It's a while before he even blinks. After maybe half an hour, he rises from the couch he'd landed on, walks over to his essay, and makes a decision.

It's probably the worst fight they've ever had.

Well, it definitely is, considering they rarely fight at all. The worst part is it's over such a stupid thing. They totally could have just *talked it out* if he hadn't snapped like that.

He keeps replaying it in his head over and over.

I suck seems to be the general conclusion.

His chest is tight as he lays on his bed, staring up at his ceiling. He hadn't eaten dinner, and he's still not hungry. He feels a lot like vomiting, actually.

He hadn't thought to ask. That was her first issue. He hadn't even brought up what places he was applying to. There had been no discussion.

Stanford was the only far off place he'd even considered, and it was really only because of Nance (because he sort of kind of misses her).

The thought of attending a university with her—seeing her on campus and hanging out at her apartment all the time—had been so tempting he hadn't even bothered to bring it up out of his own head. He'd just been so wrapped up in his sister he forgot that El would be coming, too.

Well, he hopes so, anyway. It's not like they've discussed that, either.

Shit.

It takes every ounce of strength to pull himself up. Mike rubs his forehead, trying to press away the growing migraine he feels.

It doesn't take long to get to her house. Mike takes his bike, setting it against the wall closest to the treeline, by her window.

He raps on it, eyes adjusting to the darkness. El's shadowy figure shoots up in bed, fumbling around for a minute. Dim orange lamplight fills the room.

As soon as he sees her; curled up under the covers with red-rimmed eyes, perfectly awake, his heart snaps in two.

It's raining pretty hard. Sharp droplets of water pound against his back, like cold shards of ice. He's completely soaked.

Maybe that's the reason she unlocks her window and lets him clamber inside, shivering and breathing out white puffs of air. Maybe it's the brokenness in his eyes he isn't even aware of.

They both look at each other. His teeth are chattering. He's dripping on her floor.

"I'm so sorry," is the first thing out of his mouth. "So, so sorry. I'm an idiot, okay? A complete asshole. I should have asked you what you wanted, and I didn't—"

"*Shhh*," El puts her palm over his mouth. "Lower your voice."

Mike nods. She lowers her hand, studying him, and then reaches for a nearby towel. The next thing he knows it's over his head.

“El,” he protests, trying to squirm away as she dries his hair. “El, don’t—”

The towel disappears. It’s just her again.

El puts her hands on either side of his face and makes him look at right at her. “Mike,” she shakes her head, lip quivering. “It’s okay.”

“No it’s not.”

“It is,” she sniffs. “I messed up, too.”

“That—” he sighs. “I don’t want to hurt you. Ever.”

“I know.”

“But I did,” he squeezes his eyes shut, thinking of how wounded she’d looked before. “I’m such an idiot.”

El grabs his hand. Her skin is warm against his own. It sends a shock through his whole body. “Don’t say that.”

“I *am*,” his chin wobbles, just a bit, but she catches it and her eyes widen. “I’m so sorry, El.”

“Mike...”

If the words would just form in her mouth, she’d tell him that it’s okay, and that she’s not hurt anymore; she isn’t, really—she’s just glad he came. She’d tell him that it was just a stupid fight and they’d both said stupid things. But he’s about to cry and she really can’t take that. She *can’t*.

So she kisses him.

Mike sucks in a breath, almost backing away in surprise, but then his head clears. He pulls her closer, an arm around her waist.

His other hand goes to her hair, which is half up in a scrunchie. Mike takes the tie out and then cradles the back of her head, feeling her hair spill out against his palms.

"Mike," she draws away for a second, glancing downward. She's on her tip toes.

His cheeks flush. "Oh," he says. "Sorry, um..."

"Stop saying sorry," she pleads.

He almost says it again, opening his mouth and closing it. El laughs, and it's the best sound in the whole world. He feels a wave of clarity wash over him.

El taps his forehead. "You okay?"

"Yeah, just..."

Then he's tucking his hands beneath her thighs and pulling her up. El wraps her legs around his waist without any hesitation, like she'd been waiting for exactly that, and grins.

"I'm stronger than I thought I was," he says.

"Sure you are."

His shoulders sag a bit. "You're holding yourself up, huh?"

"A little."

Mike shakes his head. El's already closing the gap between them, kissing him softly, over and over.

Then she jerks her head in the direction of her bed. *Oh my god are we going there? Okay, okay, okay*—he practically drops her, which makes her giggle. They both freeze for a second, but nothing comes of it.

He hesitates.

"Mike," El groans all exasperated before yanking him down.

He ends up on top of her, one arm on the mattress to prop himself up. "So..."

"Are you okay?"

He isn't sure. He keeps trying to sort out what's going on in his head, but it's like there's a brick wall blocking his thoughts off.

What he blurts is, "Are you mad at me?"

El blinks. Her hands come up to cup his face. "No, Mike," she shakes her head. "I'm not mad at you."

"Promise?"

He sounds small even to his own ears. El moves her arms so that they're around his neck. "I promise."

He kisses her this time, because with those words it's like a weight has been lifted from his shoulders. He finally feels a little bit closer to okay.

His mouth meets her neck and his eyes close and then it's just him and El, her pulse erratic against his lips, and her fingers thread through his hair—scraping his scalp, making him groan.

She tilts her head back. He can taste the lavender soap, the light layer of lotion she uses, and the indescribable whatever it is that's always sort of been there. It's *El*.

She moans a little. He kind of loves that whatever he's doing has left her completely vulnerable, with him.

He runs his lips down her neck, not kissing, just hovering; brushing. He feels her grip on his hair tighten, and her other hand tucks under his shirt.

Her head twitches and the light goes off.

Then her hand trails down his abdomen, drawing a shiver from him. "El..." he rasps. Mike tries to stifle the sound against her neck, but she does it again and all the air leaves his lungs.

His lips press against her neck, as gently as possible, saying what he can't. He runs his hand up her side, slowly opening his mouth against her skin.

“Mike...”

He rips himself away. She’s a lot to take in—wide eyed, red cheeks, hands grasping at his shirt.

They meet in the middle. He goes a little crazy when her mouth opens against his.

And then El pulls his shirt over his head in one swift moment—*wow*—and he meets her eyes.

They’re dark and heavy and suddenly Mike feels his senses coming back to him. He realises that his hand is under her shirt and she’s panting, and if anyone were to see them like this they wouldn’t even pause before jumping to conclusions.

There’s a small part of him that wants to keep going, but...

But they’re in her parents’ house. There’s a million more reasons, but that’s the first one that pops into his head.

Mike swallows. “We should stop.”

El throws her head against her pillow with a sigh. “Really?”

“Really really,” he reaches for his shirt as her arms fall from his neck, pulling it down over his head.

“Come back,” El pulls for him. “I miss you.”

“El,” he takes her hand, letting their fingers naturally intertwine. “We should talk.”

“We *are* talking,” she retorts. He feels her legs tighten around his waist, which draws a weird, strangled grunt from him. “Body language.”

Mike snorts. “El...”

She gives him an innocent look, but suddenly and stupidly the air gets lodged in his throat, because she’s so *beautiful*. Only illuminated by the moon; light shining brokenly through leaves and creating

patterns of pure white on her pale skin, offset with dark shadows. Her hair is splayed out over her floral pillowcase, and she's just laying there, all open and perfect, *always* perfect.

"I never wanna live without you," he blurts. His voice wavers, but knows it's the right thing to say. It *feels* right.

Her cheeks flush. She's still touching him—a hand on his waist, fingernails brushing against his skin. "Mike—"

"Also I threw away the essay, which totally sucked anyways."

He lets that hover in the air between them, creating a chasmic silence only broken by the frantic beating of his heart.

Then El is rolling her eyes, grabbing his arm and flipping him onto his back. She readjusts, hovering over him. "You stupid knucklehead," she says, but there's no real irritation in it. He can't help but smirk a tiny bit. "I love you, Mike. I just... I don't know what I want to do, and it's starting to freak me out, you know?"

"Oh," he nods, not daring to look away.

"And it seems like you have this plan, and you're just ready, and I'm *not*. You've lived your whole life here and you're ready to leave but... it's only been five and a half years for me, Mike. I *just* got started here."

"I'll stay," he blurts, without thinking but knowing it's true as soon as it's out of his mouth. "I'll wait. A year, ten, whatever. It doesn't matter. You're all I care about, okay? *You're* my future—not college or a job or whatever. I'll work at *Scoops Ahoy* if it means I'm with you, shortstack."

El stares at him for a moment longer before she firmly plants her head on his chest, forehead pressing against his heart. Something wet and hot drops onto his skin and he starts.

She's crying. *Again*.

He *sucks*.

“El?”

“Thank you,” she breathes, after a second. Her voice shakes. “I love you,” a kiss, “so much,” another.

Oh.

He wishes he could tell her that she doesn’t need to thank him—if anything, he should be thanking her. He’ll never stop being grateful; that she took his hand that night and let him lead her to his bike. That she saved them so many times. That she saved *him*.

“I love you too,” he tilts her chin up so that she’s looking at him, because he wants her to know that he means it (and he does, he always will; this warmth in his chest which pulsates and resonates will always be present—in any universe, he decides; in any time and any place, whoever and wherever they are, he will always love her).

El wipes his cheek. He hadn’t even known there was anything there. It makes her smirk. “Sap,” she says.

Mike rolls his eyes. He wraps his arms around her waist and pulls her so that she’s laying next to him. El settles against his chest. Her hair tickles his chin, but it’s great. He could absolutely stay like this forever.

“Marry me.”

“What?” El pulls away to look at him, eyes wide.

He bites his lip, even though he’s more than sure of what he’s saying. He’s never been more certain of anything, ever. “Marry me?”

“Well, yeah—but *now*?”

“Not *now*, now,” he can’t help the grin that’s spreading across his face. *Yeah*. “Just soon.”

“Soon,” she echoes. And then she returns the smile, equally as playful. “No.”

“What?”

"Ask me again," she tucks herself back into place, cheek against his shoulder. "Later."

Later. Mike frowns. They've been practically engaged since they were fourteen, when she'd asked him what the word meant. He'd explained, and the conversation had gone something like:

We'll get married some day, right?

Well, yeah, definitely—but when we're like, older, y'know?

"When is later?"

It comes out as an almost whine, which makes her snort with laughter. "You'll know."

"What?"

"Shh," she coils an arm around his neck, sending goosebumps down his back. "Go to sleep, stringy."

"I can't sleep," he rolls onto his back dramatically. "I don't know when we're getting engaged."

"We *are* engaged," she points out. "Pre-engaged. Shut up. Sleep."

"El."

"Mike."

He shuts up for a minute.

"Is it later yet?"

"Michael Theodore Wheeler," she hisses, but she's grinning, and blushing, and wow. "Go to *bed*."

Mike sighs, totally suffering, but he relaxes. She curls up beside him, warm. Within minutes, her breathing evens and her face goes still.

Sometimes he feels like he doesn't know what to do with himself around her. He feels a little bit like exploding.

“You’re not sleeping,” she whispers.

“I will, I promise,” he runs his fingers up and down the length of her arm, watching little bumps erupt like magic. She’s so pretty. Mike leans forward and kisses her, even though it’s really not the best idea, he just can’t help it.

El smiles against his lips, though. “You have zero self control.”

He grins. “Yeah, I know.” A beat. “So is it later, yet?”

“Mike.”

Author's Note:

Creds to the amazing and fantastical topangamatthews for inspiring the “fuck you” line—if you guys haven’t read ‘I Want To Ki_ _ You (answers may vary)’ yet, DO ASAP bc you’re missing out on some quality awesomeness.

Also creds to the light of my life FateChica for making my whole day with your latest chapter of ‘love you like a love song’ and literally murdering me when Mike took El’s hair out of her pony? I had to drop that in here because there’s no WAY this boy isn’t all about El’s curly hair. I also dropped that ‘stringy’ just for you ;D

I’m so nervous about this one dudes! Lemme know if you liked it/if the makeout scene was too heavy!